

1999
HANDBOOK FOR SCHOOL
CERTIFYING OFFICIALS

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
REGIONAL PROCESSING OFFICE
ATLANTA, GEORGIA
FLORIDA SUPPLEMENT**

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1999 FLORIDA SUPPLEMENT

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Because the **1999 Handbook for School Certifying Officials** has been generalized for use throughout the Southern Region, we have published this supplement to detail those policies and procedures which may be unique to the **Florida State Approving Agency** and **Florida** schools. For more complete information regarding VA education eligibility, rules, regulations, policies, and procedures, please see the handbook itself. This publication should be kept with or on the inside cover of the handbook.

Second Printing

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TOLL FREE TO ST. PETERSBURG (OTHER BENEFITS).....**1-800-827-1000**
ATLANTA EDUCATION PROBLEM LINE (SCHOOL OFFICIALS ONLY).....**(404)347-0046**
FLORIDA VA EDUCATION SERVICES OFFICE (ST. PETERSBURG).....**(727) 319-5973**
BUREAU OF STATE APPROVING FOR VETERANS TRAINING (SAA).....**(850) 487-2836**

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WEB SITES

VA CENTRAL OFFICE EDUCATION HOME PAGE**<http://www.va.gov/education>**
VACERT HOME PAGE (JOHN BATES).....
.....**<http://members.aol.com/jbates1997/vacert>**
SAA LIST OF APPROVED SCHOOLS IN FLORIDA**www.state.fl.us/fdva/educate**

**THE STATE APPROVING AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS
AFFAIRS, AND THE SCHOOL APPROVAL PROCESS**

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Veterans in Florida receive nearly \$96 million a year in federal dollars to help with educational costs. These benefits are awarded only if veterans attend **approved** post secondary programs, schools or colleges.

This section summarizes **for school and college officials** the requirements for gaining approval for educational programs enrolling veterans.

Approval ensures that these programs lead either to a formal degree or to a vocational or professional objective. Approval also allows the **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** to determine individual benefit amounts and length of assistance as well as to monitor a veteran's academic progress and credits earned.

In Florida, the **Bureau of State Approving for Veterans' Training** under **the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs** serves as the **State Approving Agency (SAA)** for veterans' training programs, as provided by Title 38, United States Code.



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SAA AND VA

The **Florida Department of Veterans Affairs (FDVA)** is the **state** agency charged with the responsibility for administering **state** programs for veterans, including **the State Approving Agency (SAA)**. The **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** is charged with the responsibility for administering **federal** programs for veterans nationwide. The St. Petersburg Education Services Office, under the administrative supervision of the Atlanta Regional Processing Office (But located at the VA Regional Office in St. Petersburg - not to be confused with the FDVA which is also headquartered in St. Petersburg) is the **federal** office with the responsibility for veterans and **federal** veterans programs in Florida.



WHAT TYPES OF PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS MUST BE APPROVED?

Any educational institution which enrolls, or is likely to enroll, veterans in training programs (except for programs of **Flight Training, Correspondence Courses, Apprenticeship and other On-the-Job Training** programs, **VA** approves those programs) must be approved by the **Florida State Approving Agency**. Examples are:

- colleges and universities
- private occupational schools
- trade and technical schools
- training and residency programs
- high school diploma, GED or post-diploma certificate programs



WHAT NEEDS TO BE APPROVED?

Publications such as catalogs, student handbooks and class schedules.

Programs leading to an educational or immediate vocational goal such as a degree, certificate, postgraduate residency, or non-collegiate technical or trade program. (Programs offered at branch campuses or facilities other than main campuses are approved separately.)

Policies on attendance, academic progress, evaluation of credit for prior education and training, student conduct and specific types of instruction such as television courses, independent study, practicums or internships, English-as-a-Second Language or other developmental programs.

Changes to any of these publications, programs or policies are to be reported to the State Approving Agency. Failure to do so could result in immediate suspension of approval and the interruption of benefits to veterans.



HOW TO APPLY FOR APPROVAL

There are two types of approval: Initial and Continued Approval.

Initial Approval

This is the first-time approval of a program, school or college.

For a school or college, initial approval involves the submission of a completed application to the **Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, State Approving Agency** followed by a site visit. For a new program at an already-approved institution, a letter will suffice and a site visit may be conducted.

Schools and colleges applying for the first time should submit a telephonic or written request to the **State Approving Agency**, asking for an application and indicating whether they:

- are accredited by a regional or specialized accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education for financial aid purposes. (Institutions unsure of their status may contact the Department of Higher Education)
- are licensed by an appropriate Florida state licensing body.
- have been in continuous operation for at least two years [applies only to private (profit/non-profit) Non-College Degree Granting Schools and Non-Accredited Degree Granting institutions].

Continued Approval

Periodically, the **State Approving Agency** will update an institution's approval. This continued approval is initiated by the School Administration sending copies of a school's catalogs, publications and other information. Institutions are required, to notify the **State Approving Agency** in a timely manner of any new catalog editions.

Between approvals, specific changes, such as adding new programs, and changes to calendar date are treated as revisions to current approval.

To continue approval, a school must notify the **State Approving Agency** in writing upon:

- printing revised catalogs, handbooks or schedules. Two sets of each publication-certified by a school official that the information is **"true and correct in content and policy"** - must be sent to the **State Approving Agency**.
- adding new programs. Submit a letter requesting approval of the new program. Include a course outline, course description, number of credit hours and complete the Personal Data form for new instructors.
- changing a program's name or curriculum. Must include a course outline, course descriptions and the number of credit or clock hours.
- naming new Certifying Officials.

- adding facilities or branch campuses, or changing an address.
- changing ownership or management.
- revisions in accreditation or state licensure status.
- altering currently approved policies affecting standards of progress, attendance, student conduct, credit for previous training and policies relating to practicums, independent study or cooperative education.



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CERTIFYING OFFICIAL?

The Certifying Official, named by a school or college, acts as that institution's liaison with the **State Approving Agency**. This person informs the Agency of any changes requiring approval and sends certified copies of the school's publications to the Agency, and also certifies Veteran enrollment to **VA**. During site and supervisory visits, the Certifying Official meets with **State Approving Agency** staff to provide necessary files and information.



WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS FOR MAINTAINING APPROVAL?

To maintain approval, both accredited and non-accredited schools and colleges must meet the following conditions.

- The catalog or bulletin must include an institution's:
 1. Standards of progress (must contain a definite statement that defines the grading system, minimum grades considered satisfactory, conditions for interruption for unsatisfactory grades or progress, description of probationary periods and conditions for dismissal and re-admittance.
 2. Attendance policy.
 3. Conduct policy.
 4. Progress records furnished to students and retained by the Institution.
- The school must maintain:
 1. A written record of a veteran's previous education and training, clearly indicating that appropriate credit for prior training has been given and training shortened proportionately.
 2. Cumulative individual records containing the results of each enrollment period, including all courses and grades.
 3. Adequate records showing the progress of each veteran, including notices of course withdrawals and last dates of attendance.
 4. Attendance records of veterans enrolled in courses not leading to standard college degrees.
 5. Evidence that tuition and fees charged to and received from veterans are the same as those for other students.
 6. Complete records and copies of all advertising, sales and enrollment materials used by or on behalf of the school for the preceding 12 months.

- The school agrees to:
 1. Enforce all policies.
 2. Notify the **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** when veterans do not achieve satisfactory academic progress.
 3. Notify the **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** within 30 days of all changes in hours of credit or attendance, including interruption or termination.
 4. Notify the **State Approving Agency** of any changes affecting approved programs, including changes to location, course offerings, degree requirements and academic regulations.
 5. Make available during regular business hours all required records outlined above to representatives of the **State Approving Agency** and **VA** during periodic on-site visits.

In addition to the preceding, the following conditions regarding refunds and evaluations apply to all **non-accredited** schools:

Refunds

A pro rata refund policy must be in place which assures that the amount charged for tuition, fees and other charges for a portion of a course does not exceed the approximate pro rata portion of the total charges for tuition, fees and other charges that the length of the completed portion of the course bears to the total length; and

1. Registration fees cannot exceed \$10 or they become subject to the pro rata refund policy.
2. Breakage fees cover only the exact amount of the breakage, with the remainder to be refunded.
3. Only the exact amount of charges for consumable supplies may be retained, with the remainder refunded.
4. Refunds for books, supplies and equipment furnished by the school will be made in full for the amount charged for unissued books, supplies and equipment. Issued items may be disposed of at a veteran's discretion.
5. Refund policies more favorable to veterans than pro rata refunds are acceptable; otherwise, schools may charge a sum not greater than 10% from the exact pro rata portion of such tuition, fees and other charges that the length of the completed portion of the course bears to its total length; the exact pro ration will be determined on the ratio of the number of instructional days in the course.

Evaluations (This requirement applies to all School Programs.)

Evaluations of the following must occur: the quality, content and length of programs; personnel qualifications; facilities adequacy of resources and financial soundness; school calendars and fee schedules.



WHAT ARE SUPERVISORY VISITS?

Unlike site visits which occur at the time of initial approval, supervisory visits are normally conducted annually by the **State Approving Agency** to review an institution's compliance with veterans' approval requirements.

For a supervisory visit, schools should have available files containing each veterans information showing attendance, transfer credit, student transcripts, enrollment status, standards of progress and all certification paperwork. In addition, the Agency may request exit meetings with other staff, faculty and students.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT:

- ◆ Adjudication receives updated approval information regarding your school at about the same time you receive your copy of your **OLAF Report - Form 1998 (On Line Approval File)**. Until that time, they do not have any information regarding your new or revised program. Therefore, it is very important that you not certify any VA students for pursuit of that new or revised program or calendar until you receive the copy of your school's OLAF Report - Form 1998 that contains the new or revised information.
- ◆ Because your OLAF Report - Form 1998 contains all of the information that each Adjudicator has regarding your school's approval, it is also very important that you review that form to insure that it accurately reflects the approval you requested from the SAA. If a change is needed, please call our Education Services Unit at (727) 319-5973, and they will take whatever action is necessary.
- ◆ The OLAF approval forms often do not have enough room to accommodate all approved programs (as at many NCD schools) or all calendar dates (as at many IHL's). In such cases the remarks section of the form is annotated to refer to Education Services any question regarding programs or dates not listed. OLAF was expanded for IHL's and NCD's, so we can now get all programs and most calendar dates on those approval forms.
- ◆ **It is also important, when certifying VA students, to use the exact course or program title as shown on your OLAF Report - Form 1998.** This is especially true for NCD programs. If a slightly different title is used, benefits may not be paid until it is clear that the program is, indeed, approved. **Sample "OLAF Report - Forms 1998" are included in the next few pages.**

APPROVAL OF DUAL DEGREES, DUAL MAJORS AND MINORS

Unless specifically approved in your school's catalog, each dual major or degree and each minor must be approved by the State Approving Agency (SAA) on a case by case basis. When making application to the SAA for approval of a dual major, degree or minor, such application must contain the information specified below and meet certain criteria (also specified below).

- ◆ Name and claim number of the VA student for whom the approval of the dual objective is requested.
- ◆ The exact title of the two degrees or majors or major/minor for which dual objective approval is requested, to include page numbers in the current, approved catalog where those programs can be found.
- ◆ An exact description of the single career field to which both degrees/majors relate. The source or authority (major professor, department chair) declaring these two programs as relating to this single career field (not applicable for minors).
- ◆ Must list total credit hours already earned toward current program.
- ◆ Total additional credit hours needed by this veteran to complete the dual objective as certified by school registrar.
- ◆ Total credit hours and unit subjects required for the dual objective.
- ◆ When applicable, the elective courses in the initial objective should be used to satisfy the courses required to attain the dual objective.
- ◆ GPA should meet the school's requirement for satisfactory progress.

All such requests must be submitted to the SAA prior to the VA student's entrance into dual objective study. VA Form 22-1995, Request for Change of Program or Place of Training (or VAF 22-5495 as appropriate), properly completed by the student, may be submitted with the request to the SAA or must be submitted to VA simultaneously.

The request for approval must be received by the SAA prior to the earning of 90 credit hours in a baccalaureate degree program or the earning of 37 hours in an associate degree program. For graduate students, the school must submit its dual objective request during the second term (semester/quarter) of the student's enrollment in graduate school.

All requests for approval of dual objectives must be signed by:

- ◆ School certifying official **and**
- ◆ Chairperson or Dean of the department, school, or college involved in granting the dual degree, major, or minor.

DUAL MAJOR/DUAL DEGREE APPROVAL
(Suggested Format)

1. Student's Name: _____

2. VA Claim Number: _____

3. Name of dual degree or major (e.g., BA/BS History or BS Business/Spanish):

4. Found on pages _____ of current catalog.

5. Single career field to which this dual degree/major leads: _____

6. Credit hours already earned toward degree: _____

7. Total *additional* credit hours need to achieve dual objective: _____

8. Total credit hours required to achieve the dual objective: _____

APPROVED BY

Department Chair or Dean: _____ Date: _____

School Certifying Official: _____ Date: _____

TEACHER'S CERTIFICATION

VA students often go to institutions of higher learning to take unit courses necessary to either renew or apply for a certificate to teach in grades K-12 in a Florida public school (teacher certificates are not required to teach in a college or junior college in Florida). We can pay VA education benefits for this necessary course work under certain circumstances. These circumstances and procedures are outlined below.

Circumstances under which VA education benefits can be paid for a teacher's certificate:

- ◆ Student has **never** had a certificate and needs one now.
- ◆ Student has had a teacher's certificate in one subject or discipline and now needs a certificate in a **different subject or discipline**. Examples include going from high school math to high school social studies, from elementary education to secondary science, etc.

VA educational assistance **cannot** be paid to a student who has received a teacher's certificate at any time in the past and now needs to get that certificate **renewed** (renewal is required by State law every five years). In that case, the student is considered to be already qualified. It is irrelevant whether or not the student used VA education benefits to earn his/her certificate the first time. Once the student has qualified for a license or certificate, benefit payments for renewal of that license or certificate are prohibited.

PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

These procedures **must** be followed in the proper sequence in order for a student to receive VA education assistance for a teacher's certificate:

1. The VA student applies for a teacher's certificate to:

**Florida Department of Education
Teacher Certification Section
2325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399**

The applicant will either receive a teacher's certificate or a letter specifying what course work is needed to qualify for the particular teacher's certificate for which he/she has applied.

2. The student takes the letter to the college or university where he/she is going to pursue the course work needed to qualify for that particular certificate.

3. The school's Veterans' Affairs Office then assists the student in completing the proper application for VA education assistance (VA Form 22-1990, 1995, 5490, or 5495). In the section requesting what the applicant's program will be, the student will list "teacher's certificate" and specify the grade level and subject to be taught, e.g., secondary social studies, elementary math, etc. A copy of the state letter specifying the course work needed should be attached. The school will certify the student's enrollment only in those courses specified in the state letter. On VA Form 22-1999 (Enrollment Certification), item 8 (Name of Program) will specify that the student is pursuing "Teacher Certification" and also specify the grade level and subject as discussed above. The particular unit subjects being pursued during that enrollment period will be listed in "remarks" on the back of the Enrollment Certification.

A student cannot be paid VA education benefits for concurrent pursuit of different courses leading to teacher certificates in more than one subject or grade level. Each subject or grade level is considered to be a program of education.

Persons receiving their degree through a school or college of education in Florida do not follow these procedures. This is because the person's objective is a specific college degree and that degree's requirements also include the subjects necessary to successfully apply for a Florida teacher's certificate.

VOCATIONAL TEACHER CERTIFICATES

All of the above procedures apply only to those persons who are seeking a State Teacher's Certificate for grades K-12. Persons who are seeking a certificate to teach at a vocational center in a non-degree certificate program are not required to obtain a State Teacher's Certificate. Instead, each local school board sets its own requirements for those instructors. In such cases, the following procedure must be followed:

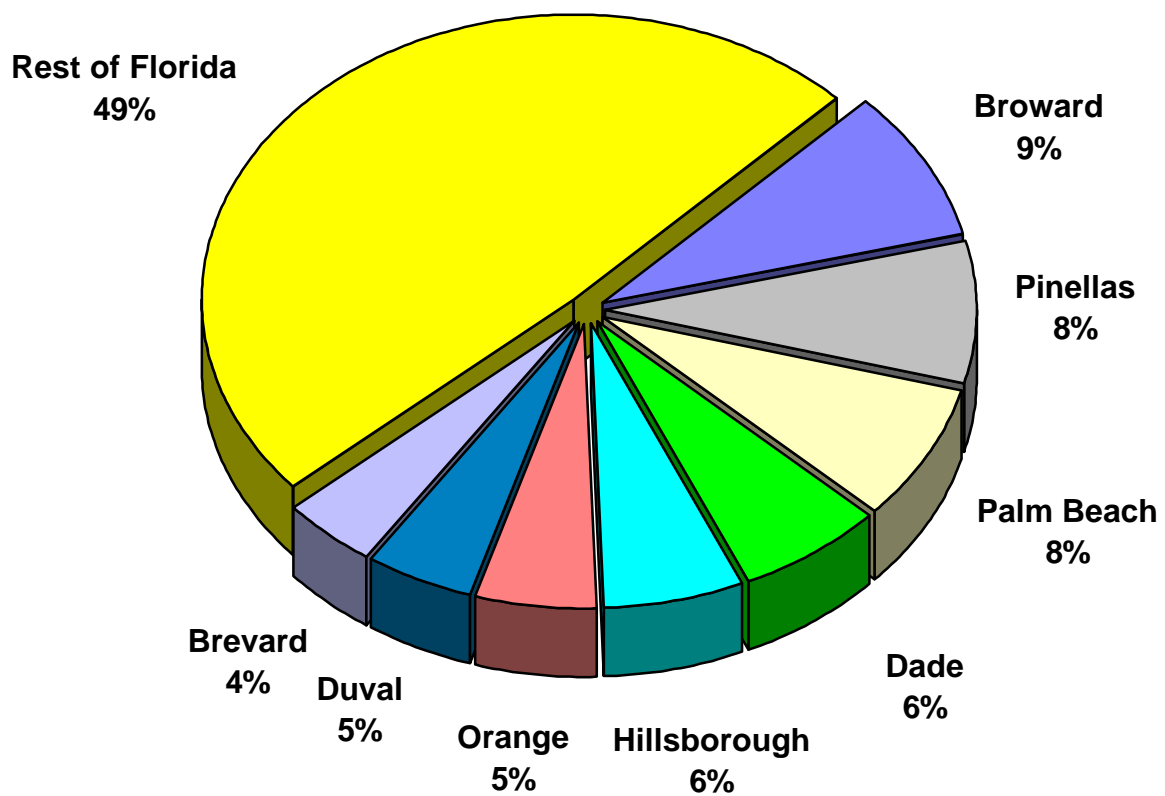
1. The person goes to the Personnel Office of the local school board and applies to be certified to teach a vocational program in that county.

2. The Personnel Office gives the applicant a letter/memorandum specifying what unit subjects he/she must complete in order to teach that vocational subject.

3. The school where the claimant is to pursue those unit subjects then follows the other normal steps as explained above to certify the claimant for those subjects.

Once again, a VA student may pursue subjects necessary for only one objective at a time, e.g., carpentry or masonry, but not both at the same time. Other than the steps outlined in 1 through 3 above, the rules governing vocational teacher certificates is the same as certificates issued by the State.

FLORIDA'S VETERAN POPULATION BY COUNTY



FLORIDA'S GI BILL EXPENDITURES BY COUNTY

